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STACY AUMONIER

Essays of To-day and Yesterday

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ESSAYS OF
TO-DAY AND YESTERDAY

STACY
AUMONIER



GEORGE G. HARRAP & CO. LTD.
LONDON BOMBAY SYDNEY

To
E. T. RAYMOND

First published October 1926
by GEORGE G HARRAP & Co LTD
39-41 Parker Street, Kingsway, London, W C 2

Reprinted April 1931

Printed in Great Britain at THE BALLANTYNE PRESS by
SPOTTISWOODE, BALLANTYNE & Co LTD
Colchester London & Eton

INTRODUCTORY NOTE

MR STACY AUMONIER'S pre-eminence in the difficult art of writing short stories is established. So well, indeed, that his other accomplishments, which are by no means few, tend to become forgotten. We like to pigeonhole our authors neatly, and when once a man has been labelled "short-story writer" it is more than a little annoying that he should present incontestable proof of being many other things as well. And here is Mr Stacy Aumonier, with inconsiderate versatility, demanding recognition both as a novelist and an essayist, and demanding it in such a way that we dare not refuse. In addition to that, he began his career as a decorative designer and landscape artist, has exhibited at the Royal Academy, has been a Society entertainer, and has performed at various theatres, in sketches of his own composition.

All the various qualities thus called forth have helped to make his literary work what it is. A keen appreciation of design and an eye for dramatic moments give him the equipment of a novelist. A lively sense of humour and a clear judgment combine to make him a shrewd and lively commentator on life and things in general. "It takes years, much training, discipline, and reflection to learn how to become a human being," he says, and it is this realization of the significance of all the details that make up life which gives his amusing reflections their value. Mr Aumonier was born in 1887.

F. H. P.

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THE THIN BLACK LINE

DO you know those days when every one seems to like you? You walk along the street and strangers smile at you kindly; pretty women exude an aura of accessibility; policemen touch their hats; errand-boys ask you for cigarette-pictures, which you happen to have; a jolly old gentleman asks you the way somewhere, and you happen to know. You meet just the right people: friends who ask you to dinner, acquaintances who tell you a really good story, tradesmen who give you the impression that your interests are their interests, a barber who takes a kind of feline delight in cutting your hair, children who are confiding and gay.

And then one day you experience just the reverse. Every one appears to hate the sight of you. They scowl at you and pass by. Women appear distant. You meet all the wrong people: rude boys and tradespeople; friends who remind you that you have not yet returned that loan; bores with tedious stories you've heard before; policemen who regard you suspiciously; gruff old ladies who ask you the way somewhere, and show annoyance at your not knowing; bus conductors who convince you that you have merely boarded a bus in order to make yourself a public nuisance. You meet no one you know, and no one who seems to want to know you.

I experienced such a day yesterday. I went for my usual walk along the Finchley Road. I had not gone two hundred yards before I realized that it was going

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to be a bad day. Everybody I passed had that unmistakable look of hostility. I tried to regard them genially, but there was no response. A man to whom I had recently been introduced cut me. A tobacconist was peculiarly surly. I had to call at two shops, and in neither was there so much as a "sir" or "Thank you." I boarded a bus, and there the sense of animosity was even more pronounced. Every one glanced at me as though they resented my presence. The conductor almost pushed me off at Finchley Road Station, where I had to dismount as I was going to the bank. I had about a five minutes' walk from there. It was the busy hour when the streets were crowded with pretty women shopping. Now, come! there is surely no harm in looking at a pretty woman as you pass by. There was no need for that almost outraged sense of propriety when I glanced at them. I felt desolate and depressed. No one asked me the way anywhere, or demanded cigarette-pictures. It was unfair. It was cruel.

I went into the bank, and there my despondence reached a climax. The cashier looked up at me suspiciously. Then he took my cheque away with him, and I knew he was doing some furtive comparisons in the corner with a ledger. After a time he returned and reluctantly handed me the few meagre Treasury notes I had applied for. I noticed that, contrary to usual practice, they were old ones. As I went out of the bank I thought:

"This is a dark day for you, my lad."

I wandered back disconsolately down the Finchley Road, still encountering glances of stern disapproval and dislike. I looked into unfriendly shops. Once I glanced at a chemist's. I'm not sure that poison was

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not at the back of my mind. Behind a lot of bottles was a mirror. I looked at myself. And then suddenly the stark horror was upon me. *I hadn't got a tie on!* I looked awful. I gasped, panted, blushed, clutched at my overcoat. Like lightning I turned up the collar and buttoned it tightly round my neck, and regarded the result. Thank God! I breathed again. Glancing guiltily round I resumed my journey. Then lo! I experienced the striking metamorphosis of the human unit. Every one became immediately friendly once more. Two ladies asked me the way to get to the Zoo. The darlings! Partial acquaintances nodded and smiled—a friend of mine who goes about cleaning the street-lamps, the man and his wife who run the flower-stall. The pretty women shoppers no longer turned away in disgust. Complete strangers gave me friendly glances. Near my turning I ran into Jimmy. Jimmy is an actor. He was on his way to the Haymarket to get his hair cut. Wonderful! No one but an actor would go all the way from the Finchley Road to the Haymarket to get his hair cut. He was in great spirits, enormously old-boyish, and told me several of the latest. And as I glanced at him I thought:

“Oh, yes, my friend. Would you be so friendly if you knew the fell secret which my coat collar conceals?”

He waved a boisterous farewell, and left me to reflect upon the grim irony of life. For I came to the conclusion that that which divides savagery from civilization is not a vast bulwark of culture and spiritual enlightenment, but a thin black line of *crêpe* or silk.

A BULLFIGHT

MALAGA

SEATED in the amphitheatre of the bull-ring yesterday and awaiting the show to begin, I had a curious feeling that I was there to watch an organized street accident.

Now there is a curious feature about street accidents in that we all have a sneaking liking for them; at least, we like them if they don't mean some one being hurt and blood flowing. We all—or nearly all—enjoy what the fifth-form boy calls “a good old muck up.” We enjoy a football scrimmage, smashing things, and throwing stones at bottles.

But when I got to my seat the first thing that struck me was the lightness of the sand in the arena. I thought of Ibanez's *Blood and Sand*. I became uncomfortably aware that one would miss nothing. It seemed extraordinary that in a few minutes' time we should see a real street accident, in which a number of animals—and quite possibly men—would be killed against that background of light sand.

I couldn't help thinking that, knowing there was going to be this accident, wouldn't it be possible to avoid it?

The King and Queen of Spain were present, and some fifteen thousand people, and the lowest price of a seat was nine pesetas. As a pageant it was magnificent.

The proceedings, conducted by a bugle from the president's box, had that heraldic quality which one associates with the Middle Ages, and one felt that

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nothing had altered one iota since. The sport, or whatever it was, was redolent of the soil, and steeped in tradition. When two knights in black rode in, and, standing before the president's box, announced that the bulls had arrived, and begged for the keys to open the gate to the ring, and when the keys were solemnly flung down, and the band played, one forgot that one had come to see a street accident.

The procession, headed by the three toreadors, gorgeously appavelled, helped to sustain the Homeric gesture. It was not till three quixotic gentlemen, on the sorriest steeds you ever saw, took up their positions that one began to have one's suspicions. Even when the bull itself appeared it seemed to be nothing but a pretty game. There were some twenty people in the ring, and the bull made tentative little plunges at scarlet cloaks, but never followed it up, because some one else immediately distracted its attention.

This went on for about five minutes, and the bull, which had at first seemed bewildered, began to regard it as all rather silly. But when one of the quixotic gentlemen on the sorry nags, carrying a pole with a short steel spike (his legs encased in steel), emerged a few yards from the barrier and began to be provocative, then I knew that the 'muck up' was coming.

And so it proved. The bull, bored with all this messing about, decided that it was time to get to work. He took the measure of this miserable equipage and charged. The picador worked his horse into a broad-side position, and made but a poor attempt to defend it. It was as though a motor-bus going full tilt had run into an old four-wheeler. There was a crash and sudden chaos of blood, limbs, horns, hoofs, and trappings.

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Don Quixote was unseated and picked up by his friends, while others distracted the bull's attentions. The bull shook himself free from the confusion, looked around, and snorted. A change came over him. He suddenly seemed to be saying: "Of course, if it's street accidents you want, I'm all for it." He was prepared to charge anything. He rushed around looking for a nice plate-glass window or a china-shop. Instead of that he met a skinny man, holding a dart in either hand above his head. This seemed easy stuff. He bore down on him, but the man neatly inserted the darts, one on either flank, and leapt aside. This was annoying, and he bellowed with anger, and tried to shake the darts out.

Three times this happened till he had six of the horrid things flapping on his back. And still the harassing of the red cloaks went on. Just to show, however, that he was not yet done he killed another horse. But he was obviously tiring.

It was then that the toreador (exactly as you might see him on the stage at Daly's) came forward, and, bowing to the King, he placed his hand on his heart and made a kind of "I, about to die, salute thee" address. And with his sword and red cloak he went into the middle of the ring, and after two attempts he did kill the bull.

I now feel I must recount the remarks I overheard from an old man near by. They had a familiar ring, and amounted to this: What's wrong with bullfighting? When *he* was a young man bullfighting was the *real* thing. They had fierce and cunning old bulls up to the age of ten; now there wasn't a toreador in Spain with the pluck to face a bull more than six

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years old. He remembered So-and-so who used to come into the ring and sit on a chair. He did all fighting from it, killed the bull seated, and got paid a few crowns. These modern toreadors thought about nothing but big purses, and running as little risk as possible. Bah! This was one of the pleasantest notes of the afternoon. I might have been at the Oval.

The old man's arguments were, however, somewhat confuted during the next encounter, for the bull got the toreador. How badly he was hurt I could not tell, but he was carried out of the ring. This seemed to unnerve the rest, for according to the experts the fighting was poor and the bulls tame. There was not one clean kill. The business of the toreador is to work the bull into such a position that he can drive his sword right through a space about the size of a saucer between the shoulders to the heart. This was never done at all, neither did one of the picadors ever succeed in defending his horse against the bull.

But a diversion was caused by bull number four. He was a fine big black chap, who had apparently certain gentlemanly instincts. He refused to go for the horses. This according to bullfighting code is a punishable offence. A bugle rang out from the president's box. One of the carabineros rushed out and hurled darts charged with bombs into the bull. They exploded with terrific violence, and immediately the whole arena reeked of grilled steak and dynamite. The bull apparently went mad. He leapt into the air like a cat, rushed across the arena and jumped the barricade. He then disappeared down a narrow passage, where he got jammed. While the audience were yelling, some for him to be sent back into the ring, for the

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kill, others for him to be killed where he was, one had an opportunity of deciphering a banner suspended across a gallery facing the Royal Box. It said: "The brotherhood of Christ who expired on the Cross welcome their Majesties the King and Queen. . . ."

During the afternoon I saw eight horses and six bulls killed, and one toreador wounded. The spectators worked themselves up to a tremendous state of enthusiasm, and never stopped eating sandwiches, honeyed cakes, and *calentita*.

To me as a casual outsider, and regarding the sport simply as a spectacle, it seemed monotonous after the first few bulls. One got tired of the incessant waving of red cloaks and the inevitable goring of the horses. If I lived here I'm certain I should be writing to the papers on "How to brighten Bullfighting." I should like more noise and less blood.

It seemed wicked to waste the magnificent driving power of the bull on bits of rag. A lot of harmless amusement might have been got out of plate-glass windows and piles of crockery. As we came out they were selling sandwiches made from the flesh of the first bull, slightly cooked. Two small boys near me were devouring them greedily. I noticed on the bread the imprints of bloody fingermarks.

Altogether it was not at all the kind of afternoon my aunt from Tunbridge Wells would have enjoyed.

THE SOCIAL SENSE

I HAVE been to prison twice within the last six months. Let me hasten to add that they were fugitive visits of a voluntary nature. But my impression is, from what I saw and heard, that prisons are filled less by people who are naturally vicious than by people who haven't acquired the social sense. The social sense is indeed not easy to acquire. If you leave three or four young children alone in a room—however refined their ancestry—in half an hour's time they will be biting each other. It takes years, much training, discipline, and reflection to learn how to become a human being.

Now the average man who throws a cigarette-end down in the street thinks no more about it. But by that gesture he has subscribed himself as a member of the body politic, because some one else has to pick it up after him, take it away, and get rid of it. Therefore, as a good citizen, it is up to him to perform some other action that shall compensate for the removal of the cigarette-end. We are all of us waited on hand and foot by thousands of other people. Even while we sleep other people in all parts of the world are making furniture, clothes, varnish, boot-polish, cricket bats, poems, beer, dyes, matches, and other commodities that we shall eventually have the benefit of and enjoy. You cannot escape from the services that are being rendered you, nor from the services rendered you in the past, nor those that will be rendered you by the unborn. To acquire the social sense is to find your place in this great scheme of universal service.

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The prison problem is desperately difficult. We have not yet reached that stage of civilization when prisons can be dispensed with. But if the prisoner shows anti-social tendencies before conviction, prison life tends to destroy any social sense he may have had. It is almost impossible for him to fit into the social scheme again. At Wandsworth Prison alone there are on an average four thousand prisoners discharged every year, of whom about two-thirds are destitute. That is to say, that from this one prison alone there are being poured into the community three thousand desperate men annually, men with the stigma of prison life upon them, men who even if willing find it almost impossible to get work. What is there for them to do except to continue to plunder the community until caught again?

But that is not the only dangerous side of the situation. Prison life is not by any means beer and skittles, but it has an insidious side. A prisoner has no responsibilities. He has a clean, centrally heated cell. He has chapel, lectures, and lessons. His food—which is adequate—is brought to him in his cell cooked. He has books and exercise, and he is given work that is carefully considered with regard to his medical record. (I heard of one man in Wandsworth who was a bootmaker by trade, but was not passed by the M.O. as fit for this work!) All of this is very demoralizing to a man without the social sense. At first he hates it, but it gradually grips him. Outside, he doesn't know how to fit in. He is afraid of people. He drops his cigarette-ends all over the place and thinks it's all right for others to pick them up. Social life bewilders him. Here is an easy solution. The prison becomes a community in itself, a life within a life. To keep a man like that for several years

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and then discharge him into the community without help, check, or foresight is like keeping a rabbit in a hutch for years, feeding it on cabbage-stalks, and then releasing it in a field of foxes. He hasn't got a chance.

One cannot, of course, expect the Government and, indirectly, the ratepayers to subsidize and endow discharged prisoners. But in the interests of the community itself it would be better if the matter were more sympathetically considered. There is nothing between the discharged prisoner and the field of foxes—or shall we say his own frailties and temptations?—except a very hard-working, inadequately supported body of men and women called "The Prisoners' Aid Society." This society is rendering great service to every one, and doing it in, perhaps, the only sensible way—that is to say, every prisoner who appeals to them is considered as an individual case.

The economics of the situation present endless difficulties, but there is one side to it which we could all contribute to modify. "The stigma of prison life" is a well-worn phrase, but none the less true for that. It is not so much the punishment at the time which breaks men and women as the effect it has on them afterwards. Now we are none of us in a position to throw the first stone, and what I would suggest is—not that these people who have been found out should not go to prison, but that every one should go to prison. You may gamble on the fact that every one has been sufficiently naughty—either in deed or thought—to merit, say, three weeks' imprisonment every year. And think of the immense amount of good it would do everybody.

For three weeks every year you would be cut off

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from such things as drinks, smokes, worries, and responsibilities. You would get up early, take exercise, rest, work, read, and go to bed early. And at night you would be left alone to look between the eyes of your soul. You would not be able to escape behind the cloak of dissipations or false social values. You would have to think yourself out. The stigma of prison life would no longer be a reproach. In after life the burglar and the bishop would meet on equal spiritual grounds. The burglar would not be conscious of that unscalable wall of inspissated unctuousness, for he would be able to say: "Ah, my lord, do you remember those old days when we were up at Parkhurst together?"

And the mind of the bishop would show a quicker understanding of that religion he professes to teach, a religion whose tenets are prescribed to enlarge the interpretation of the social sense in its most magnanimous form.

ON POTTERING ABOUT

THE first essential to pottering about is that one must be dressed for the part. By dressed I mean, of course, undressed or only partially dressed. Probably the best pottering about is done in a dressing-gown, slippers, and an unshaven condition.

What is more delightful to the accomplished potterer than to go, thus apparelled, into a sunny room after an early morning cup of tea, light a cigarette, and then to poke about, pull out a book and put it back, stare at a bowl of flowers, open the drawer of a cabinet, shut it again, while all the time his mind is registering in short wave-lengths: "By Jove! I must do that—to-morrow. I should like to paint that bowl of flowers—how jolly it looks against the dark cabinet. I really must mend that blind-roller—later on. What a great man is Bernard Shaw. I must write a play myself—soon." These reflections and determinations naturally do not follow each other rapidly. They are dragged and slurred over a comfortable period of time, further mellowed by a slow, sensuous enjoyment of languid movement, of being conscious of diligently pottering about.

For the feature of pottering about is that one must feel like doing things, but never actually do them, unless it is to pick one snail off the wall and glower disapprovingly at the other snails, or else to snip off one dead rose and say to oneself: "After breakfast I must really prune these bushes." It is justifiable to pick up one cigarette-end, but not to clean up the hearth. One may reread a letter that came last night,

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but one mustn't answer it. All of which seems strange, because at no time is one's mind so actively alive as during the period of pottering about. It is an ideal state. Indeed, so rare and precious are these abstract moments that we are not going to waste them on concrete actions.

When we are actively engaged in work that has to be done we dream longingly of the hours we shall spend pottering about. When we are pottering about we wallow in the reflection of heroic achievement. We are above the mundane claims of mere execution. Our poise is entirely spiritual.

When a man retires from business he spends the rest of his life pottering about ; that is to say, he spends it in a greater state of spiritual activity than he had ever indulged in before. Whereas for forty years perhaps he had been idling away his time as an actuary in an assurance company or as a civil engineer, he suddenly finds himself collecting cigar-bands or growing gentians. He has always wanted to indulge his spiritual passion for cigar-bands or become absorbed in the generic mysteries of the elusive gentian, but the company or the machine has stood in his way. Suddenly he finds himself free. He expands. His secret yearnings come to fruition, he becomes terribly active, he—potters about.

No longer trammelled by routine, he casually makes discoveries. Watt, pottering about with a kettle, discovered the steam-engine. Newton, pottering about with an apple, discovered the law of gravitation. Columbus, pottering about with the ocean, discovered America.

And this fact you cannot deny to our good potterer—many of the best things have been done casually; all of

ON POTTERING ABOUT

the vile things have been done deliberately. Wars are the result of routine and its calculated effects; the potterer about has no use for them. They make him hold up his hands in horror. They may restrict the extension of his collection of cigar-bands; they will certainly interfere with his development of gentians.

The potterer about is a pioneer. His business is concerned with spiritual experiment. He combines the enthusiasm of the amateur with the acquired experience of the professional. I once heard Sir Ernest Shackleton say that the main incentive to his Polar expeditions was not scientific research, but the kind of schoolboy fun of doing it, of planting the British flag where others had not penetrated. That is to say, he liked reading Shelley and pottering about in the snow, and come what must—he had no ulterior motives, no instinct of sordid gain or worldly glory. What the British Empire owes to the instinct of her sons for pottering about is incalculable. I am surprised it has never been written up.

This country has never produced a Napoleon dreaming of British world dominion. The Empire has just happened along, almost under protest. Some Englishman has been pottering about (figuratively in his dressing-gown) in an African jungle or an Indian desert, when some one has come up and said: "Excuse me, do you mind holding my baby a minute?" Or he has been pottering about the Malay Archipelago (still in his dressing-gown) when a party of people have come up and said: "I say, do you know the Chinese keep slaves in the salt-mines here? They treat them horribly. Can't you do something about it?"

And because in his pottering-about way he has a kind of conscience, he grumblingly agrees. He doesn't want

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to do any of these things. He just wants to go on pottering about, and then go back to bed. But because he is at heart a kind-hearted chap and is always being nagged by this spectre of conscience, he gradually finds himself encumbered with babies, and salt-mines, and other impedimenta. Soon he becomes weighted down, chained and fettered to the gyves of a social life that bores him. The dressing-gown is reluctantly discarded. And at night, thoroughly tired out, he throws himself on his bed and dreams. He dreams of Heaven, a place where one may uninterruptedly go on for ever, and ever, and ever—pottering about.

ON DOING WHAT YOU'RE TOLD

THERE is a phrase often repeated in the advertising spaces of the daily Press familiar to us all. It runs: "Eat more bananas!" I think it must have occurred to most of us at times to wonder whether this peremptory injunction does actually influence people to eat more bananas. It stands to reason that hard-headed business men would not spend good money repeating it unless indeed it did have the desired effect. And experience teaches us that repetition is an enormously powerful force.

It is no good saying to me once (in print), "Eat more bananas!" I should simply think, "How silly!" But if every time I pick up a newspaper I am enjoined to eat more of this yellow fruit (of which I am not particularly fond), and if people I meet keep on whispering in my ear, "Eat more bananas!" and reverend grey-haired gentlemen take me on one side and say, "What you want to do, my boy, is to eat more bananas," I know that in the fullness of time I should develop an inclination to devour bananas for breakfast, lunch, tea, and dinner.

There are, I know, certain strong-minded people who would stand out against this injunction. The mere fact of being told to eat bananas would drive them to an orgy of pickled walnuts. But they are in a minority; with the majority of us the inclination is always to do as we are told, from whatever source the order comes. In the same way we are advised to

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"Eat mustard and get strong!" "Get the Tube habit!" etc.

Among Eastern and other peoples the religious devotee is instructed not merely to repeat a prayer once, but so many times. This is quite sound. By this means the vagrant sinner learns to acquire godliness in the same way that the Pagan from Putney tends to acquire strength from the excitation of a much-advertised mustard. It reminds one of the old lady who said: "I must try So-and-so's soap. All the advertisements speak so well of it."

This very powerful instinct arises presumably from the fact that when we are children we are taught to do what we are told, unquestioningly. And this instruction carries with it a strange sense of comfort. We are born amidst incomprehensible surroundings. We have no judgment as to what is right and what is wrong, what is good and what is evil, what will do us harm and what will benefit us. But at that age we find ourselves surrounded by maternal and paternal experts in these matters. It sometimes occurs to us to challenge these teachings out of a sense of perversity and experiment, but never to challenge the actual justice of them.

But, alas! there comes an oblique instant when we no longer do what we are told, for there is no one there to tell us what to do. We find ourselves suddenly faced with the problem of forming a judgment, or making a quick decision—alone. It is a solitary and, at first, terrifying experience, and one which we all instinctively try to avoid. We come into the world alone. We go out alone, and every big moment which affects our character and our destiny is a moment that has to be faced alone. And because in all the big things we

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remain children to the very end, we are always clamouring to be told what we should do. There are odd lazy corners of our minds, dark passions and desires that cannot be explained, deep-rooted prejudices and disaffections. And in the problems they present we are still eager to snuggle beneath the protection of the expert in these matters. And so we go to the priest, the lawyer, the philosopher, and the doctor and we say: "Tell me what is right. And I'll do what I'm told."

And he comes with the force of a thousand repetitions, and he says: "Do this or do that," and we comply unquestioningly.

I have a good friend, who before the War held a responsible position in a big engineering works. During the War he was put into the R.E.'s (the right thing did get done sometimes). I met him one day when he was on leave. He had just come back from Gallipoli and the Italian front, looking very fit and well. On asking him how he was getting on, he replied: "Oh, fine! It's grand, no responsibility. You simply have to do what you're told!" He was looking fifteen years younger than when I had last seen him.

Conscious then of this power of suggestion as supported by endless repetitions, it behoves us to watch carefully what we say. For every little thing we say, however serious or frivolous, is a contribution to the herd instinct. Public conscience is less susceptible to the arguments of logic and reason than it is to the pressure of repetition. You have only to make a statement often enough and vehemently enough for it to become a fact.

If the French keep on saying that they hate the

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Germans, and the Germans keep on saying that they hate the French, well, then, they do. But it would be just as easy to make them love each other as it would be to make them both eat bananas. They could both be taught to do what they're told.

THE THRILL OF BEING ILL

IT'S no good getting a cold in the head, or any kind of absurd bilious attack. This doesn't help you at all. Your friends regard you as a bore. The people who have an affection for you display only an impatient interest.

You must do the thing properly. There must be in the first place a sudden shifting of all physical and mental values. You must glide away into a curious twilight where the division of time seems a little uncertain. And then you notice an unfamiliar figure, all in white, gliding hither and thither, performing rites that contribute to your general comfort. And a man in a grey suit, with an air of forced geniality, takes arbitrary possession of your body. And he says "Ha!" and "H'm!" in a discreetly non-committal way. And he vanishes and comes again, and vanishes and comes, and other people come and vanish, and your vanity forbids you asking too many questions, as though you think you are so important!

And then you become subtly aware of a change of attitude in the manner of certain people. They are anxious. At this realization the Ego-maniac in you rises and swells. You have come into your kingdom. You have become dramatically a centre of interest. No miserable cold in the head for you, but something with a name that has the power to frighten and disturb. Its direct bearing on you is purely objective. It seems of no great consequence, except as it affects these social relationships. Indolently you think of various friends

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who will say, "Poor old chap! He's got it!" and you visualize them discussing the matter with others.

There is a latent thrill about all this. You have bought the luxury at the price of many pains and penalties, and you rightly demand your pound of flesh. You become somnolently autocratic. You accept the attention and service of those who hover around you as the toll due to a person of special privilege. If you were commanding a ship at sea, or sitting in judgment on your fellow-man, you could not feel more secretly elated. The fact that your physical powers are dissipated, that even the actions of your own body are controlled by others, seems to add to rather than diminish this sense of personal exultation. Of course it's all wrong. But illness itself is all wrong. It is attributable in nine cases out of ten to some unnatural pressure of which this very exultation is one. In the ordinary course of social life we set up and demand a certain standard of exultation. If we fall below it we are unhappy. That is why we smoke thirty cigarettes a day and—do all the other things we do. We are constantly keying ourselves up to our own arbitrary standard of exultation. And then one day comes a crash, and the first thing the Medicine Men say, after having picked up the pieces, is: "Ah! too much exultation!"

And then we are sent away to where such a thing is apparently inaccessible. Ninety-nine per cent. of the exultation is cut off. We slowly emerge. And as we emerge we realize how wise and yet how unseeing the Medicine Men are. For though their precepts are good, they have overlooked the fact that if you knock 99 per cent. off a thing the remaining unit is still

THE THRILL OF BEING ILL

divisible by a hundred. The thrill shifts its ground, but it is still there.

We discover in the first place that whereas in the old days our time was divided between night and day—that is to say, a time when it was light and a time when it was dark—we now enjoy a cycle of twenty-four complete hours. We make friends with hours that are strangers to us. I met such a one last week. It was between two and three in the morning, and an owl went slowly by, hooting around the eaves of the house. I have an idea he must have been a young owl—one, perhaps, just starting up in business for himself—for although his cry was plaintive and very beautiful, it had not that deep velvety note of the older owl, surely the most beautiful sound in Nature.

Exultation! You cannot escape it, whatever the scale of your activities. In the early morning you hear a rustling in the corridor outside. You know that in twenty minutes' time some one will be bringing you tea. Tea! You await the thrill of the early morning tea with the same avidity that in former days you have awaited the rising of the curtain on a first night. After the tea the day proceeds on a carefully modulated progression of thrills. The post comes. That is in itself as exciting an experience as man could desire. One's whole destiny may be affected by a post. One reads the letters through very attentively twice, and even circulars about sales of jam and women's *coiffure* arrest one's attention. Whilst the pathetic offer from the gentleman who is anxious to lend you £20,000 on note of hand, without security, sends one off into vivid dreams of Southern seas or Persian palaces.

In due course follow the newspapers. In the bad old

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days one glanced at the cricket and skimmed the general news. One now reads the newspaper from cover to cover. Not an over is missed in county cricket. Even letters to the editor, weather forecasts, and political speeches have an arresting significance. And so as the day proceeds one is reminded of the poem about the little fleas and the lesser fleas. The unit functions within its restricted area with complete success. The proportion remains undisturbed. I am writing this seated among pine-trees in Berkshire. I cannot see very far because the view is cut off by the pines. A Russian lady was here the other day. She said the view made her feel homesick. "But think," she added, "in Russia we have this"—and she waved her arms towards the pines—"the same thing, stretching away for thousands of miles."

Well, dear lady, we none of us can see more than we can see. So far as my happiness is concerned there are just as many pine-trees in Berkshire as there are in Russia. It is quite likely that the lesser fleas get just as big a thrill biting the little fleas as the little fleas do biting the big fleas. It is all a question of scale.

THESE CHARMING WOMEN !

¶ ¶ /HEN woman escaped—not so very long ago—from the position of being purely man's chattel, her instinct of self-preservation prompted her to the realization of a salient fact. She saw that there was one obstacle that must be mastered if she were to retain her position of apparent equality. And that obstacle was—man's astounding physical beauty.

In the flesh she knew she could not compare with him, and so she set about her attack in other and subtler ways. It was essential for her to give man the impression, at all costs, that she was even more beautiful than he. And the generations have produced an amazing state of affairs. In the first place they have produced an industry, or rather a colossal combination of industries, whose sole activities are devoted to trying to make out that women are more beautiful than men. Industries producing frocks, hats, gloves, shoes, scents, cosmetics, powders, and jewels; and millions and millions of people slaving away night and day in order to keep up the lie.

Frocks that deceive and allure and entice, hats that bewilder, shoes that minimize, paint that heightens, jewels that sparkle, perfume that intoxicates—all these things are brought into the preposterous contest. Even in his ugly clothes a man cannot conceal his beauty. A woman requires the assistance of the whole earth to make her presentable. There would be no harm in the childish vanity this position has evoked, except for the fact that she is gradually coming to think that she

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is not only as beautiful as man, but that she is as *important*! Was any suggestion so absurd?

She has come to regard not only sex equality as a fact, but even to argue about a thing she calls 'sex antagonism.' Now, if we are to suggest that sex antagonism may be regarded as a serious issue, let it be stated at once that if the men took it into their heads they could kill all the women in the world in about twelve hours with very few casualties. Mind you, I'm not advocating this. I should disapprove of it. I like women. I merely state it as evidence that any theory of sex antagonism is worthless. It is like discussing antagonism between a lamb and a tiger.

The subject could only have arisen through her desperate realization that all these frocks and frills have failed. In spite of centuries of concentration on the subject she knows that man still remains more beautiful than she. Stripped of her adornments, woman makes pretty poor showing. And one must judge of this not by the church parade or the beauty chorus, but by the sculpture gallery.

The sculpture gallery gives the whole show away. Look at the *Apollo Sauroctonus*, the *Eros of Centocelle*, the *Zeus* from Dodona, the *Discobolus*, or some of the Medicis of Michelangelo; and compare any of these with the *Venus de Milo*, or the *Cnidian Aphrodite*. Both the *Venus* and the *Aphrodite* have beauty, but it is of a lower order. It is a passive, receptive, shrinking form of beauty. The *Venus de Milo* looks naked and thoroughly ashamed; and well she might be. And then note the extraordinary grace and poise of *Apollo* and *Zeus*; creatures made to rule, and conquer, and create.

THESE CHARMING WOMEN !

And so at the present day if you want to see real physical beauty you don't go to a ladies' swimming-bath; you go to the running-track or the towpath at our public schools and universities.

It is no reflection upon women that they are less beautiful than men. They cannot help it. But they must never expect to be co-equal with them. For by the laws of God man is the most perfect thing ever made, and woman is only the complement, the accessory after the fact of man's creation.

THE ADVANTAGES OF BEING MURDERED

AS one has to die in any case, there are very obvious advantages in being murdered—both to the individual and to the race. It cleans up the type. All animals are murdered. It is only man who has inaugurated the effete habit of dying in bed. The other animals have to be on top of their form the whole time. A damaged limb or impaired strength, and some more healthy creature springs on you and gobbles you up. And that's that. The consequence is that you are a hundred per cent. yourself the whole time, and then—finish! You are spared long years of lingering pain, melancholy, and regret.

(When I say "all animals," I must, of course, make the one reservation of the domestic cat. But the domestic cat is a creature apart from all other creatures. It has the social equation taped to the last hair. No one pretends to understand the cat. After twelve or fourteen years of an indolent and utterly depraved life, it suddenly rushes round in a circle and dies. A dog is murdered kindly. It develops something which a vet. says is incurable, and some one releases it with a shotgun or chloroform. But who knows anything about a cat's illnesses? It may behave in some astounding manner, and you think it is going to die, and then a few hours later it is torturing a sparrow in the garden. No one is anxious to be mixed up in its sinister career.)

Indiscriminate murdering should certainly be discouraged. Murders should only be done by people of great discrimination, intelligence, and high moral

ADVANTAGES OF BEING MURDERED

courage. That is why wars are an evil, because the wrong people both murder and get murdered.

But as populations increase so bewilderingly and social problems become more and more complex, it is not at all certain that Governments will not have to appoint bodies of refined and educated official murderers who will go about among the people with a licence to kill in their pockets. Their position will be somewhat analogous to that of a doctor, and their mission somewhat similar, only more direct. They should be carefully trained and be quite unrecognizable. The effect of having social life leavened by such a body of men would key up the whole standard of human behaviour wonderfully.

Suppose, for instance, you were seated in a club listening to some incredible old bore talking about his ailments. Suddenly a man comes up and plunges a dagger into his heart. You would simply say:

"Excuse me, sir, but have you a licence?"

If he says no, of course you must have him arrested. But if he says yes, and produces his licence, you merely thank him, and ring for the waiter to come and clear up the mess. Your own behaviour would improve remarkably. Imagine every time you go into a restaurant or a bus and you don't know whether the quiet little man in the corner may not have a licence in one pocket and a revolver in the other. You would surely be constrained to act discreetly. You would give up your seat to a woman or an older man. You wouldn't throw banana-skins and paper about the streets, or write foolish articles for the Press. You wouldn't ring people up early in the morning, and then say: "Sorry you have been troubled." You wouldn't

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come in late to the theatre and tell the person next to you the story of the play in advance. You wouldn't be a Nosey Parker or a Road Hog or a Superior Person. You would become terribly nice.

Manners maketh man, and there is more unhappiness and distress caused by ill manners than by what are known as crimes. Crimes are comparatively rare, but bad manners are universal, and for some obscure reason unpunishable. It seems strange that a man may get six months' hard labour for stealing a sack of potatoes, but he may walk down Bond Street wearing brown boots and a black tail coat, and pass unmolested! He may drown the band with the noise he makes eating soup. He may shout at the top of his voice all the good news about himself in a crowded public conveyance, when every one else is wanting to read. He can play a gramophone all day in some quiet backwater. He can go into a private house without wiping his muddy boots. He can bully waiters and be rude to servants, and there is no Nemesis awaiting him.

How much better that he should die—swiftly, suddenly, and as far as possible painlessly! And how much better that he should know that he is liable to die if he does these things!

The human race established expressionism largely through the agency of murder. One race murders another race, and so superimposes one type upon another. The individual debarred from this luxury by State laws is nevertheless a prolific murderer through the agency of social conditions. He wants everything for the people he loves and the rest can go hang. Perhaps even this form of murder helps to shape the mysterious purposes of human development.

THE PRESENT SEVEN WONDERS OF THE WORLD

ACCORDING to an old tradition the Seven Wonders of the World were as follows·

- (1) The Pyramids of Egypt.
- (2) The Hanging Gardens of Babylon.
- (3) The Temple of Diana at Ephesus.
- (4) The statue of Zeus at Olympia.
- (5) The tomb of King Mausolus at Halicarnassus.
- (6) The Colossus of Rhodes.
- (7) The Pharos of Alexandria (the first lighthouse).

But the time has come when we must seriously reconsider our Wonders. The Pyramids still remain one of the Wonders, but many of the others have become obsolete or have been superseded by more Wonderful Wonders.

Now I take it that a Wonder is something that inspires Wonder. It is not necessarily fine or beautiful, but a thing that creates in us a sense of awe. The Pyramids remain a Wonder partly by their inanity. I suppose the idea of lugging a lot of colossal stones out into the desert, dumping them down in the sand, and piling them up in the form of a pyramid is about the stupidest idea that ever occurred to the mind of man. But they remain a Wonder partly for this very reason, partly on account of their antiquity, and partly on account of the mystery of their construction.

I should like to hear the opinion of some much travelled and cultured authority on what he or she

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considers the Seven present-day Wonders of the World.

Personally I do not feel competent to hazard a list. I neither know enough nor have travelled enough. But it seems to me that the most important element in Wonder is size. If a thing is only large enough you cannot help being impressed by it. Nothing, for instance, could be much uglier or less impressive than a semicircular glass roof, but make it the size of Liverpool Street Station and you create the atmosphere of a cathedral. Niagara is a wonder, simply because it is an enormous mass of water falling over enormous rocks. The Ford Motor Works are surely one of the Seven modern Wonders of the World. But they wouldn't be if they were a twentieth their size. The same holds good with the Woolworth building in New York.

But well up in the list of the Seven modern Wonders I think I should place the London police. The London police have this in common with the Pyramids of Egypt in that both exude a sense of perpetuity. But where the police score over the pyramids is that, while equally impressive, they are a more sensible institution. While we have the London police as a corporate entity we know that nothing can go seriously wrong. They give an impression of a size so vast as to epitomize fate itself. I think the Government made a great mistake at the beginning of the War in drafting so many of these good fellows into khaki units, drilling them, arming them, and disguising them. If they had sent the whole lot out, armed with nothing but white cotton gloves, the War instead of lasting four and a half years would have been all over by tea-time on August 4, 1914. They would

THE PRESENT SEVEN WONDERS

just have marched very slowly and deliberately up to the German lines and said: "Now, then, come out of that! You come along with me!" And the whole of the German army would have been arrested and brought up at Bow Street the next morning and suitably fined for carrying firearms without a licence. There would have been no nonsense or fuss of any kind.

It is quite easy to kill a policeman, but almost impossible to disobey him. He is enormous, incontrovertible, and eternal. His pace never varies; his type never changes. He towers above us, directing, controlling, mothering us. His attitude is aloof, but essentially protective. When he arrests you, you know it is only out of consideration for your own interests.

And we know that on the Day of Judgment the London police in their white cotton gloves will be there in charge of the whole situation. We shall hear the rich sleepy burr of their voices exclaiming:

"Now, then, pass along, please! Don't crowd! Don't crowd! There's plenty of time."

THE PERILS OF PRECISION

HE has a new and very excellent red rubble tennis-court. Last Sunday morning he asked me to go and make up a four with himself, his wife, and a woman friend.

I turned up twelve minutes late. He was alone on the court, doing something to the net. I said "Good morning!"

He looked up at me through his gold-rimmed spectacles, then took out his watch, and regarded it and me alternately, as though he were working out a mathematical problem. At last he said: "Good morning!" by which I gathered that the gravity of my late arrival had been overlooked by a narrow margin. I felt a little resentful at this attitude, as although I was late the women were not there, and he himself had not yet apparently got the court in working order. He continued to potter about with the strap and chain. After a minute or two I said: "It's a nice morning." He suddenly turned, blinked up at the sky, and then blinked at me as though I had made some astonishing statement. He said: "Now what do you mean precisely by 'nice'? Do you mean it's a nice morning for tennis or do you mean that the weather is nice? or what do you mean?"

"Well," I stammered, "I just meant it was an—er—a pleasant morning."

"Ah! there now I have you! Pleasant, yes! I understand now. But 'nice'!"

He walked to the end of the court and called out:

THE PERILS OF PRECISION

"Sophie!" At the window of the sitting-room above appeared his wife, a fair, pretty thing, younger than he. She called back:

"Bertha and I are just coming."

"Yes," he called back. "But tell me, my dear, where is the dictionary?"

"You had it at breakfast, James. I think you left it in the bathroom."

"Come," he said. We went inside. He found the dictionary, and examined it for some moments.

"It is as I thought," he continued. "'Nice' has several meanings, but not one of which you could apply to a morning. Dainty, delicate, polite, but the true and precise meaning of nice is 'exact.' Now you cannot have an exact morning. Exactly what? Exactly fine? Exactly wet? It is neither. The conditions exactly right for tennis? If you argue that way you must first postulate that all men and women are physically and temperamentally the same. But whereas one man will play better on a fine day, another will play better on a wet day. On a wet day the court is heavy and demands physical strength in the player. That little girl Bertha who is playing with us this morning is at a disadvantage on a wet day. Therefore, as you cannot have an exact day, you cannot have a nice day."

"I'm sorry," I said faintly (I had been up very late the previous evening). "Are we going to play soon?"

As I spoke the two women entered. He turned to them.

"Come, come," he said. "I said eleven o'clock. It is now twenty-three minutes to twelve. Nothing is accomplished without punctuality and precision."

"James," said his wife, "do you know you haven't

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got your shoes on? And didn't you tell me last week you had lost your racket? Where is it?"

"Lost!" he exclaimed. "I would hardly employ the word 'lost.' Lost implies a condition of irrevocable irrecovery. Let us say mislaid. It is true I took it to be restrung, and for the moment I have forgotten which shop. However, I will use that oval-shaped racket that Uncle Robert inadvertently left here. It has five strings missing, and is concave in shape."

To my surprise, his wife—who had apparently been brought up at the same school—here stepped into the breach.

"Why should you say it is concave any more than convex? No one has ever yet discovered which is the front of a racket. Go and get it, and put your shoes on."

It was ten minutes past twelve when we came out to play. A good deal of the time was spent by James explaining the advantages of an oval racket slightly warped. Einstein and the fourth dimension were brought into it. It was finally decided that the best arrangement would be for the men to play the women. James served. The first ball went over the garden wall. The second ball hit me on the back of the head. We crossed over and he served another double fault. At that moment the telephone bell went somewhere upstairs. His wife dashed off the court and disappeared.

"The telephone is sometimes very inconvenient," said Bertha.

"Inconvenient!" said James. "Now, when you say 'inconvenient,' do you mean incommodious, unseasonable? What do you mean? One can hardly call it unseasonable, because one has it all the year round. Now the dictionary—to be precise——"

THE PERILS OF PRECISION

His wife appeared at the window above.

"James, it's Aunt Emma. She says: Do you know a word of seven letters, beginning with *s* and ending with *a*, that signifies a chemical substance only found in the quartz mountains of East Borneo?"

The eyes of James narrowed. A kind of greedy look crept into them. He was like a man whose secret vice had been discovered. He leant the oval racket against the net and said:

"Perhaps I had better speak to her."

We all went in. The three of us sat in the lounge and he went into the sitting-room. We sat there for twenty minutes. Above our desultory conversation I caught such sentences as:

"No, no, my dear, when you refer to root, do you mean root in the generic sense or in the purely vegetable sense?—Seven down—it can only be the amboyna-tree—yes, three—it doesn't fit in with spatula—sixteen across. Innocuous has a very different meaning from innocent——"

When he at length returned Bertha said:

"What a lot of waste of time there is over those absurd puzzles."

James regarded her critically.

"Waste! Now what do you mean precisely by 'waste'? The true dictionary meaning of 'waste' is loss by dissipation, wantonness, or negligence. You cannot possibly argue that——"

"What I mean precisely is," said Bertha, "that the tennis has consisted of you serving two double faults, and now it is pouring with rain and time to go home to lunch."

At the door his wife apologized.

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"Not at all," I said; "I've had a most delightful morning."

And then I caught the eye of James. I could see it coming.

"Delightful? Now what do you mean by delightful? Do you mean——"

He didn't say it, however, and I turned my back quickly. As I was going out Bertha said:

"Sorry you haven't had a nicer morning."

"Oh!" I answered, "it's been perfectly exact," and hurried away.

THE BIRTH OF IDEAS

I HAVEN'T an idea in my head!" How often does one not hear this expression! When stated by any kind of creative artist it implies a grave but usually temporary disorder. For the world is governed by Ideas. Indeed, the world wouldn't exist at all if some one hadn't had the *idea* of a world. America wouldn't have been discovered if some one hadn't visualized an America. All the arts, sciences, religions, and philosophies owe their inception to an idea. The word comes from a Greek word which means 'to see.' And that is the whole point of Ideas. It is a question of mental vision. There is a twilight borderland where Ideas dwell. And the man of Ideas is usually the man who can the more easily relax (mentally). In this condition his mentality is played upon by the actions and movements of life going on around him. He becomes a medium anxious to impart impressions. The practical person is often lacking in ideas because he remains mentally rigid. He is not going to stand any nonsense from ideas. He is impervious to outside influences.

Suppose several people enter a room—say the drawing-room of a seaside boarding-house. To each one it is a different emotional experience. One man will instinctively value the furniture; another will be depressed by the sordid atmosphere. A painter will see it in terms of paint; the satirist regard it in the light of a cynical jest. One man will go straight up to examine a print on the wall; another will take up a book from the table to see what book it is. To one person it may

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seem a gay and pleasant room; to another just the reverse. They are all media played upon at various angles by the Idea which created the room.

When it comes to the creative artist the importance of the effect is manifest. The room *must* mean something to him. He cannot mentally afford to regard it just as a boarding-house drawing-room with so many chairs, tables, and what-nots. It must be the playground of his emotions. It is for this reason perhaps that so many great artists are just egoists and babies. An evening spent in this room by a pork-packer might be tolerable and even pleasant, but an evening spent in that same room by a Whistler or a Beethoven would be torture (especially if the daughter of the house played the piano!). But it doesn't follow that the room would be antipathetic to any creative artist. Mr Pett Ridge might find it a source of inspiration; Mr H. M. Bateman a rich field of comic ideas. The point is that to every one every human experience means something different. It is not the coward who dies a hundred deaths; it is the man of imagination, because he can visualize the whole thing in detail before it happens. It is often the dolt who "only tastes of death but once."

One cannot force ideas, though they may be sometimes lured over the borderland. One has to lie in wait. Sometimes they creep out and gambol like rabbits at sundown. Then you have to seize one of the little rascals by the scruff of the neck and carry him off. And there is this to be said for them. Like rabbits they breed rapidly. It may be the tiniest suggestion, but once born they are—like everything that lives—a complete entity.

The strange part about it is that an idea need not be

THE BIRTH OF IDEAS

original—it seldom is—but it must be original to one-self. One often hears a statement of a truth which comes to one in the form of a revelation. And one says: “Why, of course, I’ve always thought that!” At the same time, it has not been revealed to us before. It is as though there were a great common pool of ideas into which we are all allowed to dip. We draw out the ideas and they flow through our minds, and when we have done with them they flow back again. And the pool is unfathomable, inexhaustible, and terribly mysterious.

SUMMER MELANCHOLY

DURING the long winter months the average Londoner puts his emotions away into cold storage. He grouses and grumbles about the weather, but he doesn't really mind it. He doesn't notice it, except as a convenient subject to grouse and grumble about. He gets on with his work and business and is quite happy.

And then one day he is conscious of something stirring, he feels it in his bones. He looks out of the window and sees the buds. The young shoots are appearing. He regards them with surprise as though he never expected to see them again. He feels strangely restless. The weeks pass, and the gardens and the parks are aglow with white and pink blossoms. The shutters are opened in the great house in the square. The exquisite people have returned. Thin, tanned, beautifully groomed old gentlemen appear in Piccadilly. Exquisite ladies, with weary eyes, bearing the perfume of foreign lands, step from the upholstered sanctuary of their limousines on to the flags of Bond Street. He knows then that the summer is upon him, and his heart is filled with melancholy.

The contemplation of beauty in any form produces a sense of melancholy, because the possessive sense is outraged. Seeing it all he wants to possess it all. Health and wealth, the flowers at his feet, love, beauty, wisdom, and the stars above him. He wants to take them in his arms in one supreme moment that is somehow made to last for ever. And because it is all unattainable,

SUMMER MELANCHOLY

because he is so poor, so insufficient a thing in this vast fecundity, his heart is heavy within him. If only it would all keep still, be his very own. But it is shifting, shifting, and he is being left behind.

He shakes himself and goes on with his work, but it is difficult to concentrate. A starling awakes him in the twilight of dawn. Strange surgings and desires pass through him, surgings and desires that are always freshly unfamiliar, and yet older than the earth. New friendships entice him, old affections quicken to the beat of unfamiliar rhythms. He is wretchedly unhappy, but desperately in love with life. Perhaps the lover is always unhappy, because something tells him that satiety is an illusion.

London in the early summer! is there anywhere richer in the things that matter? Music and laughter, wise men and beautiful women, old trees, old traditions, majestic squares, good wine, the thrill of sport, the pageantry of royalty—already he envisages the flashing by of the familiar signposts that mark the accustomed course, from the first cricket match at Lord's to the Derby, Henley, Wimbledon, Eton and Harrow, and so on to that remote affair known as Goodwood, when the whole thing blows up. The exquisite people vanish then like dead leaves in an autumn wind. He himself goes away with his wife and family to the sea for a week or two, but the glory has already begun to fade. He lies on the beach, with his legs wide apart, staring at the sea. And he thinks to himself: "It's a rum funny business!"

And then the evening comes on, and the vast immensity of sea and sky becomes flooded with orange and amber! He regards it with awe and a kind of soul-

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hunger which he knows will never be satisfied. It terrifies him and makes him sad again. And so one day he packs his bag and returns to London. And he takes up his pen, or his tools, or his brushes, and he bends once more over his work. And he is happy again—until the next summer. Here is something which he may possess entirely. Here is a little niche in the cosmic universe he may fill completely, something which is his own, perhaps the only thing which is his own—the right to serve.

EAST OR WEST ?

TO compare one civilization with another it is an obvious advantage to know something of both. Nevertheless there are certain generalizations concerning Eastern and Western people discernible to the eye. And the difference largely centres round what may be called mobility. I went to a little Mozabite town in Southern Algeria called Ben-is-Guen. It is the most spectacularly immobile place I have ever visited. In the first place it was built in the second century, and nothing has altered since. There are the same people living in the same buildings, wearing the same clothes, thinking the same things, having the same mental outlook for two thousand years. And you have only to look at them to know that—unless through some external pressure—they will be just the same two thousand years hence.

The Mozabite, you must understand, is a perfect gentleman. Ben-is-Guen is a holy city. You are not even allowed to smoke a cigarette there, nor is any alcoholic liquor allowed to enter the town. At sundown every Arab, Christian, or Jew has to leave it. No Arab, Christian, or Jew has ever spent a night at Ben-is-Guen. The Mozabite gets up early in the morning in order to go out and sit in the sun and do nothing. He does this until it is time to go home to lunch. After this he has his siesta. About three or four o'clock in the afternoon you see crowds of Mozabites emerge from their houses with enormous keys, about a foot long. They look like benign Blue-

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beards. They lock up their houses (and their wives) and amble up to the market-place. And there they sit on their haunches, five deep, for the rest of the day and do absolutely nothing. Occasionally a stranger will rush round the market with a shawl or a rug, but nobody buys it, and so he goes home. The market is presided over by the Caid, who sits on a chair and does nothing. Nobody does anything. It is marvellous. No women or children are allowed in the market-place. I presume because they might introduce an element of mobility. Women—when they do appear—are swathed in miles of *haik*, with only one eye showing. According to the Mohammedan religion they have no souls. They just die. They are treated on the same plane as donkeys, or rather on a lower plane, because you may talk to a Mozabite about his donkey, but he regards it as an insult if you refer to his wife. As though you had referred to something unclean. He held these views in the second century, and you know quite well he will hold them in the year 3925.

On the other hand, he is for the most part clean, moral, and—a point that must impress any Westerner—he takes his religion very seriously. There is about him an extraordinary air of benevolent detachment.

Now as a social proposition which of these two civilizations is one to regard as the better?

Personally I would plump for the Western every time. The West, with its external ugliness, its commercialism, lack of religion, its sordid problems, cocktails, night-clubs, shingled smoking girls, its restlessness, its craze for excitement—well, it has in any case the genius of being dissatisfied. It marches. The self-complacency of the East is a thing to be seen to be

EAST OR WEST?

believed. The West doesn't know what it wants. But it is always groping out, feeling its way toward something, inventing new religions, new philosophies, twisting its mental outlook, shifting and reforming its social groups. It is terribly mobile, dangerously so to itself sometimes.

When I sat in the market-place at Ben-is-Guen and thought of the tortuous history of Europe during all those two thousand years while these dear old gentlemen had just been sitting there, looking kind and thinking nice thoughts, I shuddered. To attempt to perpetuate a static condition is to deny God and Nature. I might conceivably believe that the incompetent plumber who comes to mend my lavatory basin has a soul, but that Rebecca West hasn't. But I couldn't go on believing this for thousands of years. Oh, no, East!

THE ABSURDITY OF FACTS

THE writer of fiction is always handicapped by the crudity and absurdity of facts. His business is to strike a sane balance in a mad world. He has to create situations which are not only probable, but which convince the reader as being probable; whereas the most fantastic, unlikely, bizarre, improbable things are happening in real life every day. If he does create such a situation the Knowing One comes along and says:

"Ah! this is all right, but it is bad psychology. A woman wouldn't have done so-and-so under such-and-such circumstances."

As though anyone could dogmatize with regard to how a woman would act under any circumstances! Or a man either, for that matter. Now a dictionary defines psychology as "the science of mind on the data of consciousness." The only trouble with this definition is that there is no such thing as a "science of mind." People talk airily of psychology as though it were a thing you could learn, like chemistry or algebra. But the mind of man is too elusive, too complex, and too fluid to be circumscribed by the tenets of a defined science. For one thing, it is always changing, always moving on, both individually and collectively. The ideals of yesterday are the commonplaces of to-morrow. The psychology of one generation is unrecognizable in the next. The psychology of one individual may convey nothing to another.

The individual and the herd interpret the data of consciousness in a subtle and ever-varying language.

THE ABSURDITY OF FACTS

One person is unable to conceive the mentality which would lead to murder, quite unaware that the man he is dining with, and who is talking so charmingly about Chinese porcelain, murdered a woman in Australia last year. This is a perfectly conceivable situation, but presented in fiction people would say: "No. A man who murdered a woman in Australia last year wouldn't talk about Chinese porcelain. He would always be looking furtively around, and you could tell by his eyes that he had committed a dreadful crime."

Fiction must have form, but facts are amoeboid. In a novel or a story everything must take its place and contribute to the structure of the whole. Facts are for the most part unrelated. Try and consider your own life as it would appear in the form of fiction. You may have had romances and strange experiences, but they are all disconnected. The facts that have cumbered your way would make very dull reading. We have probably all at some time, for instance, found "the time, the place, and the loved one all together." And then perhaps when you turn up you get a piece of grit in your eye, or the girl has raging neuralgia. These absurd facts would ruin fiction. People don't get grit in their eyes or have neuralgia in fiction. It is indeed astonishing what wonderful health people in fiction enjoy. You never read of a hero who gets pyorrhœa, and who has to have all his teeth out, but there are many heroes in real life who do. Heroines are particularly healthy. They often get up at dawn—a horrid hour!—and go for a ramble through the meadows picking flowers. Have you ever seen a woman at dawn? She looks her worst. And if she is young—as all heroines must be—she likes to sleep till at least eight o'clock,

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and even then she is likely to be catty till you have plied her with hot tea and eggs and bacon.

But to return to your own life, can you say that it has form? Is there any working up to a climax, and then letting down gently to the end? I think not. You are indeed hardly connected with what you were yourself twenty years ago. Memory fades, and desires and convictions change. You are a queer nebulous mass of passions, emotions, prejudices, and desires linking the dead with the unborn.

If you were fiction you would be rounded and complete, but because you are only just a bundle of facts you are really rather absurd, you know.

THE SEASON OF HOPE

FAITH and Charity may be greater, but Hope is the girl of grit. She is a born fighter, tenacious and unbeatable, with inexhaustible powers of 'coming back.' This morning I saw her heralds, little yellow and violet things sprouting in the grass between the graves of the cemetery. I suddenly realized then that while we have all been talking the back of the thing has become broken.

Hope did it. The Londoner emerges, like a sparrow that has been out all night in the rain, shaking its feathers and chirruping upon the window-sill. Soon the boys will begin to oil their bats and dream of centuries. The rich will come trailing back from Spain and Switzerland, and mighty glad they'll be to come. The long months of darkness, rain, and fog are penetrated by the sword of this persistent goddess. The Londoner is faithful to her. He grouses and grumbles and loves it all, because she is ever by his side. He is sustained not only by her but her thousand children. His heart is warmed by their little clinging arms, his senses quickened by their little whispers. For sometimes he hardly dare listen. The pictures they draw are so dazzling, the visions they conjure up so bright.

Bills and debts accumulate and he dreams of winning the Calcutta Sweepstake. He is ageing and broken in health, but there is always that beautiful woman who will one day love him passionately. The incurable knows that to-morrow a miracle will happen.

Every one goes through the day fortified by the little

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gifts of Hope. But with more than anything perhaps does she play with the dreams of wealth. People could not live under the appalling conditions that so many do, were it not that, at the back of their minds, there is always this established idea that they will one day be, not only better off, but romantically rich. The ways and means are of no consequence. The thing will happen somehow. Destroy the millionaire, and you rob the working-man of his choicest idol.

Man plays with the dreams of wealth because he knows that wealth can give him the things he understands, material comforts, security, even romance. But deeper down than this Hope is also busy. The man understands wealth, but he only vaguely understands himself . . . where he is joined up at either end. He knows his actions have reactions, and that the reaction has a sharper recoil than the force of the action. And this is always disconcerting him. For he perceives that in the train of the goddess there follow also unpleasant little imps called disappointments. And right deep down in his heart he nurtures the greatest dream of all—the dream of a vague and ultimate satiety, that shall have no reaction, that shall be in fact a condition of perfection.

Well, let him. He may be right. Hope is a liberal mistress, and withholds her goods from no one. The more you take the more she tempts you. The crocuses are out in the park for anyone to see. Mr Shaw has come back from Madeira. The world didn't end on February 6. England has won a Test match. A friend returned me a book the other day. He had only had it two years.

I know that everything now is going to be all right. There will be no more wars. Mr Kirkwood will

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THE SEASON OF HOPE

accept a peerage. No one will send me 'final demand notes' (printed in red) saying that unless I pay some mysterious sum—which is never explained how arrived at—under Schedule P.Q. within three days, I shall be cut off or cut up, or in some other way dismembered. That girl in the flesh-coloured stockings, whom I pass on the way to the pillar-box, will smile at me pleasantly for once. No one will write anonymous and abusive letters telling me what silly nonsense I write for an evening newspaper. And then *I* shall win the Calcutta Sweepstake, and every one will be kind and charitable and companionable, and——

Well, really, my *dear* Hope!

What a hope!

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